

Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

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Burnsville, MN 55337
952.707.2000
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May 3, 2019

St. Paul NAACP
Attn: Jim Hilbert

St. Paul, MN 55102

Dear Mr. Hilbert,

Thank you for sharing your concerns and the concerns that were reported to you regarding Metcalf Middle School. It is our goal that every student knows they are valued and welcome in District 191 schools. We understand that students of color experience racism - structural and personal - daily, and that it's our job to change that experience in all the ways we can, so that they have the best opportunity to succeed in school and be prepared for their futures.

To that end, our district values include "Respect: I will honor the uniqueness of myself and others" and our strategic directions include closing gaps and raise achievement for all students, and creating a culturally proficient school system.

We are always open to partnering with organizations that share these values and want the best for our students, so again, thank you for reaching out in support of District 191 students.

To respond to the specific concerns outlined in your letter, I offer the following:

1. As you are aware, schools and districts across MN and the nation are struggling with issues of under achievement and over identification for suspensions for students of color. Sadly, we are no different than our colleagues in other districts at this time. However, we are taking steps to address these concerns through intense ongoing training in Culturally Proficient School Systems for all schools in our district. We are identifying barriers to instruction, deep biases of staff, and ways to incorporate into every conversation about every student ways to improve their educational experience, not diminish it. In the administrators' first year, we have seen some signs of improvement in these numbers at Metcalf year over last year, but we have much work to do.
2. Any report of racist language has been investigated with appropriate steps taken. Items such as behavior or harassment policies, context, consideration to special education services and other items are used when working with staff and students to correct behaviors. In no way do we condone this behavior, but the corrective actions may vary based on a number of factors that we can't disclose to staff, students or the community. Simply because people are not aware of all the circumstances or considerations that go into decisions, doesn't mean that we have not addressed the matter. As far as the graffiti reference, the one incident that I am aware of in my position took place at the high school and was found to be the action of students from another district.

3. This event was thoroughly investigated and appropriate action was taken. Again, because of data practice rights, I can't go into this. However, as with so many inflammatory social posts, they do not always provide context as entire videos often will. We regret the comments and understand the harm caused by them. We have taken steps to work with the community and other strategies to ensure student behaviors are addressed appropriately, rather than parroting comments.
4. We do support the Black Student Union (BSU) at Metcalf Middle School. We have other affinity groups at our secondary schools in alignment with our values. This was the first year for the BSU at Metcalf and some guidance was needed for middle school students. Administration naturally stepped in to provide parameters for both the students and the adviser to be effective, while understanding that they are students with an obligation to still attend classes and focus on studies. The administrators provided a model with parameters, and within that model sought options, ideas and input from the students and adviser. Student attendance is the only limiting factor to the group. We are eager to get the group up and running so it can be an active, positive outlet for our students and contribute to the overall school community.

If you have questions about any of this information, I will be happy to do my best to answer. If you wish to speak in person, we would welcome that discussion, as well.

Sincerely,

Stacey Sovine
Executive Director of Human Resources